

Thousand-Miler Essay

Wanda Brown

9/7/21

I started my journey in 2000 with several women and one male co-worker. We were hiking once every month for about a year and then I lost these regular hikers. Over the years I have found a few regular partners who have hiked many times with me. One partner, Dianne Bryant moved to South Carolina; one great partner, Janet Luhman, got cancer and had to quit hiking and finally died after becoming quite active in our local Indianhead Chapter and donated a large sum to the Alliance. She asked that I sprinkle some of her ashes at the end of my hike (hopefully without losing her). She had to wait for several years to be sprinkled and only got lost once in one of my small fanny packs. (She was resting in a small silver whisky flask that fit nicely in my back pack.) With the right partners that knew Janet, like Theresa Werner, we would sit Janet on a log to have lunch with us. Now Janet's flask is being repurposed to hold another set of ashes to be sprinkled on the trail. My last 11 days spread over 2.5 weeks was the most concentrated of my hiking (130 miles). Longest hike was 20 -22 miles and very few of them.

I got active in the association and continued to hike any time I could. It was sporadic as we got farther from the Western Terminus. I hiked during MSC projects or after them, after nursing conferences, after IAT Annual conferences and in the last years on a few RV trips with my husband to hike on purpose. My husband is not a hiker, so I needed to find partners for hiking. At the Merrill annual conference, Theresa Werner & I gathered email addresses to be able to reach hikers and named the Group the "1000 Miler Wannabees". Techy Theresa went home and put the names into a face book group that we are proud to say has reached 1000's. I have used that site to recruit hiking partners whenever I did not have someone with which to hike.

When I started hiking, I intended to only hike the trail segments and not the connecting roads. However, when I started hiking with Rita Fox and Therese Werner in Langlade County I decided to hike the roads as they were and I did not want to just wait for them.

I have hiked with 99 identified partners and have listed them on the excel document that was available to list our miles and keep a log of our progress. I would like to be entered into the competition for the record of having hiked with the highest number of partners. I did not count my boys and my cub scout dens who hiked the Interstate trails prior to my decision to hike it all. I did not count the group numbers of hikers @ the annual meeting hikes nor the workers that hiked with me into MCS projects.

Alas, the recording active excel document is listed from the Eastern Terminus to the west, just like the original atlas maps read from Right to Left across the page and from the Eastern Terminus to the Western. It was extremely difficult to follow and to list my hikes. As the years have gone by, the maps were reversed making them easier to use, but not to record on the backwards excel document. But I persevered and reworted and fixed some sections to match my h.p;iking of the sections. It has been great fun to see all the changes in the trails as the years have gone by. One of the new hikers who attended my ending party was so excited to see the old original maps.... Esp the black and white ones that were drafts printed off the internet before the better atlases were developed by dedicated volunteers !!

Sitting here trying to think of the most unique things about my hike.... I just keep passing all the people through my mind. The hikers and the workers that build the trail are the best part of the trail !!! They are the ones that make the best memories !! Scenically, I think the Western Terminus looking at Angle Rock of the St. Croix River and the steep rock trail going up the cliff in The Devil's Lake Segment are the most spectacular. But the wonderful prairies and all the many wild flowers are ever so special too. I love the mixed forest in the fall when only rusts and green pines are there.

It is with pride that I write this essay. Proud of myself for persevering and completing my 1137 mile hike. Proud of all the trail workers who have spent so many fun filled hours with me. Proud of our organization that keeps going forward, making the trail more complete and available to more people. I look forward to helping others complete their IAT trail quest, working in our Indianhead chapter, building more trail on the IAT and in our local community, & hiking other trails. Perhaps not in their entirety, but WHO KNOWS !!

Wanda Brown